

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 203076

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PREL, FR

SUBJECT: CURRENT SITUATION IN PORTUGAL

1. IN COURSE OF TOUR D'HORIZON AUGUST 10, PRIOR TO RETURN
TO FRANCE FOR HOLIDAYS, FRENCH AMBASSADOR DE LABOULAYE
RAISED PORTUGAL WITH ASSISTANT SECRETARY VEST AND
SPECIFICALLY ASKED FOR U.S. VIEWS ON NEW PORTUGUESE PRIME
MINISTER AND JUDGMENT OF HIS FUTURE PROSPECTS.

2. VEST SAID THAT OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT THE IMMEDIATE
PROSPECTS APPEAR TO BE ONLY A CARETAKER GOVERNMENT. JUDG-
ING FROM RELATIONS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES, NEW PRIME
MINISTER COULD SUCCEED IN PUTTING TOGETHER AN ACCEPTABLE
CABINET WHICH PARTIES WOULD TOLERATE, BUT SUCH A GOVERN-
MENT COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO MAKE TOUGH DECISIONS AND ACT
FORCEFULLY, FOR EXAMPLE, IN DEALING WITH THE PORTUGUESE
ECONOMY. IN THEIR ACCUSTOMED WAY, PORTUGUESE MAY USE
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THIS COMPROMISE ARRANGEMENT TO TIDE THEM OVER A DIFFICULT
PERIOD.

3. DE LABOULAYE AGREED WITH THIS JUDGMENT. HE ALSO
AGREED WITH JUDGMENT THAT EANES IS A RESPECTED LEADER WHO
WANTS TO ADHERE TO DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL PROCESSES.

4. DE LABOULAYE THEN OBSERVED THAT FRENCH KNEW VERY LITTLE ABOUT EANES' MEETING WITH ANGOLAN LEADER NETO AND ASKED FOR USG VIEWS. VEST COMMENTED ON FACT THAT MEETING HAD APPARENTLY BEEN EXTREMELY FRIENDLY. DE LABOULAYE OBSERVED THAT PROGRESS IN RESTORING PORTUGAL'S INFLUENCE AND POSITION IN ANGOLA COULD WELL HELP EANES WITH HIS DOMESTIC POLITICAL PROBLEMS. IN DE LABOULAYE'S VIEW, THE PORTUGUESE REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL, AND PARTICULARLY MELO ANTUNES, MIGHT BE MORE WILLING TO ACCEPT NEW CARE-TAKER GOVERNMENT IF THEY AND OTHER MILITARY COULD HAVE RENEWED HOPES OF PLAYING A ROLE AGAIN IN AFRICA.

5. VEST CONCLUDED CONVERSATION ON THIS SUBJECT BY MENTIONING RECENT VISIT TO WASHINGTON BY ADMIRAL SOUTO CRUZ WHO RELATED TO USG IN SOME DETAIL OTHER NEEDS OF PORTUGAL MILITARY EMPHASIZING WHAT HARDWARE AND OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS WOULD BE NEEDED TO KEEP PORTUGAL MILITARY CONTENT. VEST NOTED THAT U.S. OFFICIALS HAD LISTENED SYMPATHETICALLY BUT HAD MADE CLEAR TO SOUTO CRUZ LIMITS OF OUR AID RESOURCES, AS COMPLICATED BY OUR ANNUAL BUDGET PROCESS WHICH PRECLUDED COMMITMENTS BEYOND CURRENT FISCAL YEAR. VANCE

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